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### *Language awareness amongst teachers in a central German dialect area*

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# Language Awareness amongst Teachers in a Central German Dialect Area.

## Introduction

According to Wegera (1983: 1477) little research has been done into how conscious teachers are of the specific needs of pupils who speak non-standard dialects of German. Mattheier (1980: 126) complains that teachers are only slowly being involved in the process of changing attitudes towards non-standard dialects and their speakers by being confronted systematically with such issues during their training and being encouraged to reflect on their own prejudices. Hagen (1987: 75) writes: ‘Several research projects have shown that teachers do not know how to cope with the problems of dialect-speaking children in schools. [...] Didactic literature seldom presents suggestions and recommendations. [...] In teacher colleges and teacher training this problem is almost non-existent [sic]’.<sup>1</sup>

Various studies (e.g. Reitmajer 1979, Köb 1981, Ammon 1989) indicate that Hagen’s claim is correct. 62.3% of primary-school teachers in Swabia claim to have heard nothing about links between non-standard dialects and educational problems during their training (Ammon 1989: 134). This is remarkable considering how much was written on the topic in the 70s and 80s by academics in the fields of education and sociolinguistics.

At one time it was assumed that non-standard dialects of German would eventually die out (Broweleit 1978: 179; Clyne 1995: 105) and any educational problems suffered by speakers of non-standard dialects would automatically be eradicated. However, since the early 1970s, there has been talk of a *Dialektrenaissance*. Allowing for the fact that some varieties described by their speakers as *Dialekt* differ from the ‘traditional’ local dialects, it is nevertheless true that varieties which diverge markedly from standard German are still widespread, especially in central and southern Germany.

This article will discuss how and why the teacher-training curriculum could / should be informed by sociolinguistic research, before presenting an analysis of data collected from teachers of German through interviews and questionnaires. On the basis of

that data I shall explore how well teachers are prepared for their role in the classroom, and how they cope with the requirements of the curricula for the subject 'German' and the needs of pupils whose vernacular is a regional non-standard dialect. We will then be able to see to what extent the situation outlined by Hagen (1987) has changed.

## **Desiderata for Teacher-training Curricula**

If teachers are to be sensitised to the specific needs of pupils who speak non-standard dialects and to contribute to changing attitudes towards these varieties and their speakers, then teacher-training courses must include systematic discussion of these issues. One way to improve teacher-training courses is to include a unit on Language awareness. Van Lier (1995: xi) defines Language awareness as 'an understanding of the human faculty of language and its role in thinking, learning and social life. It includes an awareness of power and control through language, and of the intricate relationships between language and culture'. On the basis of works like Hawkins (1987) and of the demands made in specific curricula (e.g. *Bildungsplan für die Realschule Baden-Württemberg. Deutsch*, 1994; *Lehrplan Deutsch. Realschule. Rheinland-Pfalz*, 1984), I would suggest the following as core issues to be included in such a course:

- different functions of language;
- formal and functional differences between speech and writing;
- linguistic variation: its form and function;
- Deficit and Difference theories: their consequences for the evaluation of linguistic variation and for language teaching;
- information on the specific non-standard regional varieties used in the area where the students are likely to be employed.

## **The Functions of Language**

As shown by Ryan (1979), amongst others, linguistic varieties are not mere instruments for transmitting information but are often imbued with symbolic and affective meanings. However, according to Neuland (1993: 7) this insight has not been developed

sufficiently in the field of teacher-training despite the fact that the curricula often refer to this aspect of language (e.g. *Bildungsplan für die Realschule Baden-Württemberg. Deutsch*. 1994: 17; *Lehrplan Deutsch. Realschule. Rheinland-Pfalz*. 1984: 7).

Teachers who are unfamiliar with this aspect of language will not understand why some children persist in using non-standard dialects in situations where the teachers consider only standard German to be appropriate. They may also harm a child's self image by expressing negative attitudes towards the non-standard dialect, not necessarily realising that criticisms intended as criticisms of particular linguistic usages are interpreted as criticisms of all that is symbolised by those usages.

Furthermore, teachers may be unaware that their own usage can create barriers between themselves and their pupils, e.g. a teacher from northern Germany may not realise that pupils in central or southern Germany may interpret his / her choice of variety as indicating a wish to create or maintain distance in the relationship or to stress his / her social superiority.<sup>2</sup>

Another potential problem when teachers are insensitive to the symbolic nature of language is that they are unaware of how certain children may be marginalised (even bullied) because they speak 'differently'<sup>3</sup>: teachers who are aware of the powerful social indexical role played by language are better placed to initiate class discussions about linguistic 'otherness' and to get pupils to talk about their reactions to certain varieties, and to reflect on the social consequences of linguistic stereotyping.

In Germany, non-standard dialects seem to have a role as a form of youth language (Ehmann 1992). Scholten (1988: 237) shows that pupils make greater use of non-standard features as they progress through school and she explains this phenomenon by referring to the social embeddedness of linguistic variation and its ability to assume differing symbolic values at different life stages.<sup>4</sup> For her informants standard German apparently symbolises particular aspects of the adult world (what she (1988: 242) calls the standard culture of the official world, with its forms and constraints) and is rejected, along with that world. This is illustrated by the fact that pupils who speak standard German (or a standard-like variety) have fewer friends than speakers of broad non-standard dialect (Scholten 1988: 237).

Unless teachers understand the value system of the community in which their pupils live they will find it difficult to motivate pupils to master the standard variety, i.e. they will find it difficult to fulfil a major requirement of their job (that this is a major job requirement for teachers of German is clear from the curricula: *Bildungsplan für die Grundschule Baden-Württemberg. Deutsch*. 1994: 17; *Lehrplan Deutsch. Realschule. Rheinland-Pfalz*. 1984: 28).

### **Spoken / Written Norms**

For many years the only acceptable form of standard German was the written literary register. Differences from writing tended to be seen as deviations from the written norm, rather than being judged on their own terms. Ammon (1989: 17) claims that non-standard dialects have often been used in German schools in order to sensitise pupils to the differences between spoken and written language. However, this does not necessarily mean that the structural differences between spoken and written language are discussed systematically. What seems to be the case (confirmed by teachers in my survey) is that features of speech (specifically of the regional non-standard dialects where they are spoken) are used as examples of how not to write. Pupils are told to avoid certain words and constructions because they are inappropriate for written registers. This is not the same as educating pupils to use the spoken language fluently and effectively. The problems that may occur because of the mismatch between pronunciation and spelling may also be discussed with examples from non-standard dialect, although how systematically is not clear since this depends on the teachers' knowledge of the local phonological system. Using only non-standard dialects to illustrate the difficulties that may arise when a child moves from one medium to the other also implies that only speakers of non-standard dialects have problems and that speakers of standard German or more standard-like varieties can simply write as they speak and produce perfect texts. This is clearly not a true reflection of the linguistic situation in Germany today (Barbour and Stevenson 1990: 183-90; Wagner 1987: 132). If teachers are aware of the characteristics of spoken language in

general as well as of the specific characteristics of the local vernaculars they can help their pupils become fluent in the spoken and written media.

### **Linguistic Variation**

Despite the best efforts of sociolinguists, some people persist in believing that there should be uniquely correct ways of saying / writing something and view variation as a nuisance to be suppressed rather than as a potentially valuable resource. Amongst the reasons usually given for such attitudes are that tolerance of variation can ultimately lead to fragmentation of the speech community (Bayer 1984: 318-19), and that speakers of non-standard varieties find it difficult to master the standard variety and foreign languages.

The problem of fragmentation is surely exaggerated: it is difficult to envisage the imminent breakdown of German into a 'chaos of competing and mutually unintelligible vernaculars' (Cameron 1995: 111, referring to similar worries about English). As for the alleged 'problems' with the acquisition of standard German and foreign languages: several of the teachers in my survey give examples of speakers of non-standard dialects who are fluent in standard German and foreign languages (see, too, Greulich 1995: 79-80). As Wagner (1987: 131) says, referring to a study carried out in Bavaria, there is no evidence that speakers of non-standard dialect *per se* have problems at school: a correlation between use of a non-standard dialect and a low mark in German was only established for pupils who used broad non-standard dialect forms even in formal situations. As for the acquisition of a foreign language: some non-standard dialects have features that are more similar to the foreign language than is the standard variety, and Viereck (1983: 1494-5) shows that speakers of some Austrian non-standard dialects could be at an advantage when learning English because of certain phonological / phonetic similarities. Also, a more conscious approach to variation can help children with the acquisition of other languages in general by familiarising them with important linguistic concepts such as the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. Children's motivation to learn standard German may also be increased if they are encouraged to see it as an addition to their repertoire rather than as something that must necessarily replace their vernacular, the variety that often symbolises their

membership of a particular social group (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 108-114) and the giving up of which would signal a wish to distance themselves from the group .

### **Deficit Theory Vs. Difference Theory**

In the wake of the reception of Bernstein's work on class-related communication barriers, there was a lively discussion in Germany about the merits and drawbacks of these two theories. Some academics and teachers called for compensatory education, i.e. extra instruction in standard German to 'compensate' children for not being native-speakers of it (Roeder 1992). Others (e.g. Dittmar 1980), however, claimed that this approach to mother-tongue teaching did not help the speakers of non-standard dialects since it expected them to take the initiative and change their linguistic habits rather than requiring society to change its attitudes. Dittmar and others called for emancipatory education based on the Linguistic Difference theory rather than the Linguistic Deficit theory which Bernstein seemed to be propounding. The Difference theory assumes the functional equivalence of all varieties of a language, whilst accepting that they are differently evaluated by society (Dittmar 1980: 128-31). Dittmar demanded a critical approach to this social evaluation (i.e. that non-standard varieties are appropriate only in informal, private and / or non-official domains, which are normally less positively evaluated than formal, public and / or official domains) and a recognition of the social historical conditions which have established a particular set of linguistic practices - the standard variety - as dominant and legitimate (Dittmar 1980: 128-31; Thompson 1991: 5; Bhatt and Martin-Jones 1992: 292). Cameron, too, criticises the uncritical use of the discourse of 'appropriacy' by some proponents of Difference theory: 'the way [they] use the language of 'appropriateness' has the effect of treating norms as facts, of obscuring their contingency and thus of blunting critical responses to them. The alternative is to make clear that while norms materially affect people's behaviour [...], these norms are open to challenge and to change' (1995: 235).

The difference theorists seem to have won the day in the educational domain: most curricula refer to the fact that pupils should be taught to use different varieties of German in an 'appropriate' fashion (e.g. *Bildungsplan für die Grundschule Baden-Württemberg*.

*Deutsch*. 1994: 20; *Lehrplan Deutsch. Realschule. Rheinland-Pfalz*. 1984: 7). However, Dittmar's calls for a critical approach to the domain distribution of different varieties and the social evaluation underpinning it have not found the same echo. The traditional distribution of standard and non-standard varieties across public and private domains or formal and informal ones, seems to be accepted rather than challenged. A course on Language awareness should encourage trainee teachers to become aware of the interplay between sociologically significant and linguistically pertinent variation (Bourdieu 1991: 54) as a first step towards equipping them to participate in a truly emancipatory education for their pupils.

### **Specific Information**

The curricula for the subject German often demand that teachers take the child's vernacular as a starting point<sup>5</sup>, but there is no guarantee that the teacher will know anything about this variety. The vernacular of most pupils at *Realschulen* (similar to the old British secondary modern schools<sup>6</sup>) in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate is a variety that differs on every level from the standard variety that is the supposed medium and subject of instruction in German classes. This vernacular is part of the repertoire of varieties they use to communicate with others and to forge social relationships and any account of linguistic usage in its social context will be incomplete if it does not refer to this variety. The curriculum recognises this, e.g. the following paragraph makes it clear that 14-15 year-olds in Baden-Württemberg are expected to discuss non-standard regional dialects, specifically those spoken in the south of Germany: 'Class 9: Field of work 2: Literature, other texts and media. Recommended reading: Dialect poetry' and 'Subject matter for class 9: Regional dialect; regional dialects in southern Germany; [development of a uniform standard variety = optional topic]' (*Bildungsplan für die Realschule Baden-Württemberg. Deutsch*. 1994: 295-6).

The situation of teachers in Germany differs from that of British teachers in that, because of factors like the federal organisation of the education system, many teachers train locally and then find work in their home state. Therefore many of them are familiar with



the situation in the area and some of them speak non-standard regional varieties themselves. This does not, however, mean that they have a systematic knowledge of the way in which the local variety differs from the standard variety, nor does it necessarily mean that they interpret the use of the different varieties in the same way as their pupils. Furthermore, Cheshire (1982: 53) found that teachers of English who lacked awareness of the systematic differences between standard English and the non-standard dialect of their pupils tended to mark inconsistently, thereby confusing the pupils. This is an additional reason why teachers should learn about the local variety.

## **The Present Study**

The last section discussed why certain sociolinguistic issues should form an integral part of the teacher-training curriculum for teachers of German. This section will investigate to what extent teachers are already familiar with these issues and how their sociolinguistic awareness or lack of it affects their ability to cope with the curricular requirements and the needs of pupils who speak non-standard dialects. In order to explore these and other issues, a questionnaire was devised which then formed the basis of interviews with 33 teachers of German at *Realschulen* in Mannheim and the surrounding area. The teachers came from schools in two states, Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, but all in the Pfälzisch dialect area. Most of the interviews were carried out by myself and recorded, but in some cases the teachers preferred to take the questionnaire away with them and return it later. I would have preferred to have interviewed every teacher personally but many were (understandably, in view of the increasing pressures on them) reluctant to give up time for an interview. 19 of the informants were female and 14 male. The average age was 47, ranging from 33 to 59. On average, the informants had been teaching for 21 years, although 4 were relatively recent recruits (less than 10 years in the job).

The questionnaires used with the teachers contained questions about (i) their social and linguistic background (age, length of service, where they trained, place of origin), (ii) their practices when correcting oral and written work, (iii) their models for standard German, (iv) their competence in and attitudes towards non-standard and standard

varieties, and (v) the content of their training. In order to try to answer the research question stated above, I shall concentrate here on the responses to the following selection of questions. The first four questions are concerned with the content of teacher training courses:

Question 1. Reflection on language (*Sprachreflexion*)<sup>7</sup> and dialect didactics (*Dialektdidaktik*) are two concepts which are well known to linguists. Did you come across them during your training or during in-service courses?

Question 2. What did you learn about linguistic variation during your training? Was it discussed? What types of variation were discussed?

Question 3. Did college prepare you for the fact that many pupils in this area speak regional non-standard varieties of German?

Question 4. How much do you know about the history of the local non-standard dialect?<sup>8</sup>

The next question was designed to establish how well teachers cope in practice with the fact that many pupils speak non-standard dialects:

Question 5. Is the local dialect sometimes the subject matter of a class? If so, which aspects are discussed (e.g. local dialect today; the history of the local dialect; the development of the German regional dialects)?

The next two questions were asked to establish whether teachers ever used non-standard dialect as a medium of instruction (or allowed its use by pupils). I assumed that answers to these questions might shed some light on the informants' attitudes towards the present domain distribution of standard and non-standard varieties.

Question 6. Are there any situations in which you consider non-standard dialect suitable as a medium of instruction?

Question 7. Do you ever make concessions to your pupils' non-standard dialect?

Questions 8 and 9 were asked in order to see to what extent teachers were familiar with certain basic ideas of sociolinguistics despite their lack of exposure to them as students. The concept of *Dialekt als Chance* (non-standard dialect as opportunity) occurs often in the academic literature. For sociolinguists it usually means two main things: (i) regional non-standard dialect as a means of expressing one's identity: it gives information

about a person's geographical and social background and is used to show solidarity with others from the same background; (ii) multilingualism as a valuable resource, i.e. speakers of a regional non-standard dialect have an additional register, which is more appropriate in some situations than standard (Bücherl 1993: 72-6). It is assumed that the repertoire also includes standard. This is a rather one-sided view of 'non-standard dialect as resource' since there is never any suggestion that monoglot speakers of standard German should acquire a non-standard dialect in order to expand their repertoires: the power relations between the two varieties would make such a suggestion untenable<sup>9</sup>.

Question 8. Some linguists talk positively about non-standard dialect as opportunity - can you imagine what they mean by that? Do you agree with them?

Question 9. Why is non-standard dialect still spoken by so many people?

I also interviewed some of the lecturers responsible for courses in German (socio)linguistics and elocution at the teacher-training colleges in Heidelberg and Karlsruhe about their curricula. These colleges are popular with students who are from the Pfälzisch dialect area, and / or who intend to look for employment in that area.

## **Results**

### *Teacher Training*

Question 1: 21 teachers claimed not to have come across dialect didactics; 9 claimed to have heard a little about it; 1 claimed to have come across it (the numbers do not add up to 33 because some informants gave unclear answers).

With regard to reflection on language, the picture is only slightly more encouraging: 16 claimed not to have come across it; 9 had heard something about it; 4 answered in the affirmative, without reservations. Therefore, although more informants had come across reflection on language, the majority claimed not to have heard of either concept.

Question 2: 22 claimed to have discussed some aspect of linguistic variation, but 7 of them went out of their way to say that it was not an important part of the curriculum and that they had learnt little about it or that it was only just starting to be discussed.

The aspects of variation that were mentioned as having been discussed were:

8 mentions: Dialect geography.

7 mentions: Differences between spoken and written language; Social differences.

6 mentions: Stylistic variation.

5 mentions: Codes (linguistic barriers).

3 mentions: History of German.

1 mention: Specialist registers.

Dialect geography tends to focus on the oldest forms of the non-standard dialects, not necessarily those used by pupils. Topics such as the differences between speech and writing and the social and stylistic dimensions of linguistic variation were occasionally discussed in (socio)linguistics seminars, but these were rarely compulsory. One informant told me of a seminar she had found useful: 'Standard German for Pfälzer'. Here she learnt for the first time (although a speaker of non-standard dialect herself) that Pfälzisch had a 'grammar', i.e. that it was rule-governed just as standard is. This insight had implications for her attitude towards it and its speakers. However, this seminar did not count towards her final exam. More such seminars (not only for Pfälzer) might help to dispel the view that the grammar and vocabulary of non-standard regional varieties (or even grammar and vocabulary more typical of speech than writing) are simply wrong or even not German. Remarks such as the following, recorded during the interviews, illustrate this attitude:

(a) 'Mischeln: das gibt's überhaupt nicht. Das Wort existiert gar nicht, nur mündlich, in der Schriftsprache gibt's das nicht' (mischeln (non-standard dialect for 'to shuffle cards'): it doesn't exist. The word simply doesn't exist, only in speech).

(b) 'Gedenkt ist ja falsch; es ist einfach falsch, es heißt gedacht. Der Oma angerufen - das ist ja ein falscher Kasus' (gedenkt (non-standard-dialect for 'thought') is wrong, isn't it; it's simply wrong; it's 'gedacht' (standard German). Der Oma angerufen (to phone granny, granny in dative not accusative case as in standard) is a wrong case).

(c) 'Im Süddeutschen werden oft Verben und so einfach ganz falsch benutzt, oder die Sätze werden total verdreht oder so, das ist einfach grammatikalisch dann falsch' (in

southern German verbs and such like are often just used wrongly, or the sentences are totally twisted or something, that is simply grammatically wrong then).

Question 3: Only 8 teachers thought that their training had prepared them sufficiently for work with speakers of non-standard dialect. 13 answered negatively. The other informants did not answer or answered unclearly.

The problems are illustrated by the following example: one informant, originally from northern Germany, said that she found it almost impossible to know when a child was using a construction that was part of the regional non-standard dialect and when s/he was using 'wrong grammar'. Thus she could not draw the child's attention to those areas where there were systematic differences between his / her vernacular and the standard. *Pfälzisch* by Beate Henn (1980) is aimed specifically at teachers in this dialect area to help them predict what errors pupils with non-standard dialect as a mother-tongue are likely to make in speaking and writing standard German, but only four informants had heard of it.

The prospectuses of the teacher-training colleges in Heidelberg and Karlsruhe for 1996-97 show that both offer a range of linguistics courses, although few courses are specifically sociolinguistic and the range is not as great when compared to literature courses. Lecturers told me that sociolinguistics courses are popular, but that no courses are compulsory except for introductory courses which try to give an overview of all the different branches of linguistics in a semester.

Even teachers from the area know little about the local variety as shown by the responses to question 4. Of the 23 who answer this question clearly, 9 claim to know nothing, and 10 claim to know only a little or not much about the local dialect. This leaves only 4 who seem to know something about the topic. Over half (5) of those who claim to know nothing about the history of the local dialect are locals, and locals make up only half (2) of those who claim to know something about it. Clearly, no knowledge is assumed by the schools: presumably if it were seen as something desirable the teachers would feel under pressure to acquire some knowledge.

It is clear that, on the whole, the informants had little contact with the ideas and research findings of sociolinguists during their training. The discipline of dialect didactics, which ideally should form a bridge between sociolinguistic research and its concrete application in the classroom, seems to have been neglected even more. Even when academic sociolinguists attempt to apply their findings in such a way as to offer concrete support to teachers, these attempts seem to have been a failure as evidenced by the way in which Henn's book remains largely unknown.

### *Teachers and Non-standard Dialects at School*

Question 5: 24 (73%) of the 33 informants discuss non-standard dialect in some form or other, but the way in which it is treated varies considerably. Although the curriculum for Rhineland-Palatinate lays less stress on teaching about non-standard dialects (it is not a compulsory topic), only 2 (22%) of the teachers from Rhineland-Palatinate say that they do not discuss it at all (in Baden-Württemberg, where 14-15 year-olds are expected to discuss regional dialect, specifically the dialects spoken in southern Germany, the figure is 7 (29%).

The reasons given for not discussing it are as follows:

4 mentions: Not enough time; More important topics (this might be linked to lack of time - if there were more time then topics considered less important could be accommodated).

1 mention: Not required by the curriculum (this is untrue for Baden-Württemberg); Multinational schools should teach standard German (this refers to the fact that many German schools have a large proportion of pupils for whom German is an additional language).

12 of those who claim to discuss dialect as a topic claim only to deal with it 'in passing' or in the context of other topics (e.g. when reading literature), or to look at it only occasionally. That leaves only 12 who claim to discuss it in class as a topic in its own right.

The following aspects are discussed:

8 mentions: Development of regional dialects from Middle High German.

6 mentions: Texts in regional dialect (poetry, prose, drama).

5 mentions: Dialect geography (different German dialects).

3 mentions: Linguistic variation in general; The local dialect today.

2 mentions: Pupils write texts of their own in the local dialect.

1 mention: 'Expressive accuracy in dialect' (Treffsicherheit des Ausdrucks im Dialekt); *Pfälzer Sprachdiplom* (diploma in Pfälzisch); Differences between written and spoken language.

(Some teachers mentioned more than one aspect.)

There is no clear consensus regarding which aspects are discussed, although the historical aspect is most popular, even if it is not the most obviously relevant to the interests of the pupils. However, the topic could be used to show pupils that regional non-standard dialects have developed independently and are not corrupt versions of standard.

There is no indication that Pfälzisch, the local dialect, enjoys any privileged position. Most teachers who discuss non-standard dialect at all say that they discuss the development of the German dialects or the problems / opportunities offered by non-standard dialects in general, not by Pfälzisch specifically. When pupils read dialect texts, they are given texts in different German regional dialects and expected to compare them with each other and with their own vernacular. There would appear to be no opportunity to discuss the history of Pfälzisch or its present status. The most any teacher seems able to devote to any aspect of dialect is two to three hours per annum. This is unlikely to send out positive messages about the importance of this variety.

Questions 6 and 7: An affirmative answer to question 7 does not necessarily mean that the informant uses a non-standard dialect him/herself - it may simply mean that s/he allows pupils to use it in certain situations and for certain functions. The informants in the present study do not always make it clear whether they are equally likely to make concessions to pupils' speech in the classroom as outside it: the answers to questions 6 and 7 were sometimes conflated, therefore the answers to both questions are treated together. The informants claim to find non-standard dialect acceptable for the following functions:

8 mentions: To discuss dialect as a topic.

7 mentions: To encourage pupils to contribute in class; To lessen distance / create warmth / show solidarity.

6 mentions: For authenticity in speech and writing.

5 mentions: In personal conversations.

3 mentions: To resolve conflict; In role plays.

2 mentions: To tell someone off; To illustrate differences between speech and writing; Suitable for use in long oral contributions.

1 mention: To discuss certain genres, e.g. farce, lyric poetry; 'In drastic situations'; To amuse pupils.

Although only 4 informants claim that a non-standard dialect would never be suitable as a medium of instruction and the same number said that they would never make concessions to the pupils' dialect, dialect does seem to be considered suitable only for certain stereotypical topics, such as dialect literature, or for events that are marginal to the 'real' business of teaching (e.g. personal conversations), or for topics that are not of academic importance (e.g. sex education). There is no evidence that teachers make any effort (or have any inclination) to extend the permitted domains of use of non-standard dialects. This supports Neuland's (1979) findings<sup>10</sup> and implies that these informants are not inclined to question the traditional domain distribution of non-standard and standard varieties which underpins the curricula. In theory standard German seems safe in the hands of these teachers: the need for a standard variety and the desirability of its promotion by the school is not obviously challenged.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Sociolinguistic Knowledge of Teachers*

Question 8: Yes: 21; Yes with reservations: 2; No: 5; 'I cannot judge': 1; Unclear answer: 4.

The majority can think of reasons why speaking a regional non-standard dialect could be regarded as offering pupils an opportunity. The reasons they give are varied (some informants gave more than one reason).



12 mentions: It offers a chance to those who cannot speak standard very well (e.g. they can contribute in class).

5 mentions: It helps to create good relationships with other people; Wider vocabulary in some domains / linguistic flexibility / greater repertoire if one also knows a regional dialect.

3 mentions: Regional dialect is more colourful / powerful than standard German.

2 mentions: It would be a loss for the language as a whole if the regional dialects were to die out; Easier to learn another language; It is part of the culture.

1 mention: Greater scope for creative use of language.

Only 5 informants maintain that regional non-standard dialect facilitates interpersonal relations, and 5 also point out that speakers of a non-standard dialect (if they also speak *Hochdeutsch*) have a larger repertoire than those who speak only standard German. However, for most of the informants the major way in which non-standard dialect can be an opportunity is that greater tolerance of non-standard dialect, especially in formal domains, means that those who speak only a non-standard dialect, or those who do not speak standard German very well, can speak out more confidently in their mother tongue. This is a different interpretation of the concept of *Dialekt als Chance* and sees non-standard dialect not as a bonus for all if its speakers, an extra string to their bow, but as a means of enabling certain speakers of non-standard dialect (those who have not mastered standard German, i.e. those who are seen as having a deficit) to make some sort of contribution in the school domain. This is a less positive interpretation of the concept of *Dialekt als Chance* and suggests that there is still a gap between the theorists and the practitioners.

Question 9: The following reasons were given why non-standard dialect is still so widespread in the area:

9 mentions: It is a marker of group identity / identification with the area, with other speakers of non-standard dialect.

6 mentions: People don't have to think when speaking the local dialect / it's their mother-tongue / they feel more comfortable.

5 mentions: It is bound up with regional culture / traditions.

3 mentions: It is bound up with the individual's sense of identity; Associated with conviviality, creates warmth, removes barriers; Local dialect has a certain role in society (not specified further).

2 mentions: The local dialect is vigorous and earthy; Negative connotations of standard German; It is passed on in the family.

1 mention: Lower social classes don't bother about speaking correctly; It is a sign of protest (amongst young people especially); Local dialect can be used to tone down negative comments; It has prestige amongst its speakers; Emotions can be better expressed in local dialect; It's a lingua franca; Some things can be expressed better in local dialect (larger vocabulary in some domains).

(Some informants mentioned more than one reason.)

The fact that the local dialect is bound up with individual as well as group identity is the factor that is mentioned most often, which indicates that some (but fewer than half) of the informants are aware that 'Language is [...] a central fact in everyone's social life. [...] it is through language that personal and social identities are maintained and recognised' (Stubbs in Milroy and Milroy 1985, vii-viii). There is also some awareness of the fact that, in the context of a repertoire that includes standard and non-standard varieties, the latter usually symbolise social intimacy or solidarity while the former symbolises distance (Milroy 1987: 36). If we compare informants who can speak a non-standard dialect with those who cannot, we find that 8 of the 12 who refer to non-standard dialect as a component of individual and / or group identity have at least some competence in a non-standard dialect. Of the 7 who refer to the way in which non-standard dialect is more appropriate for expressing emotions or creating intimacy, 6 speak a non-standard dialect. This implies that any language awareness which these informants have is the result of personal experience rather than of any training they received. It seems that those who do not speak non-standard dialects, not having undergone the same experiences, are less

familiar with basic sociolinguistic findings. Clearly there is much work to be done to disseminate the findings of academic researchers and theorists amongst the practitioners.

## **Conclusions**

Hagen (1987) claimed that teacher training colleges did little to prepare teachers for the needs of dialect-speaking children in schools. This study provides more empirical support for that claim. The curricula of teacher-training colleges have been influenced by the work of academic sociolinguists insofar as many of the linguistics courses which are offered at Heidelberg and Karlsruhe deal with issues that are relevant to future German teachers (e.g. Sociolinguistics and language teaching; Spoken language - written language; Standard varieties - colloquial speech - regional dialects; The sociolinguistics of multilingualism). However, the fact that these courses are still optional means that their importance is played down and many students miss out on them. Few of the teachers in this survey had been introduced to important sociolinguistic issues which, in my opinion, are of direct relevance to their pedagogic practice with speakers of non-standard dialects.

The lack of preparation affects the informants' own practice and the treatment of the local non-standard dialect in the classroom is sporadic and unsystematic. Although it is interesting that most of the teachers in this survey are prepared to allow dialect in the classroom for certain functions, thus contradicting the common assumption that the classroom is exclusively the domain of standard, the functions for which they consider dialect appropriate indicate that, in theory at least, the traditional domain distribution of dialect and standard is not seriously challenged.

The answers to questions 8 and 9, discussed in the last part of the article, throw some light on why the standard enjoys the privileged status it does in the school: dialect is seen as providing an opportunity for pupils who are not proficient in standard, rather than being seen more positively as an additional variety in their repertoire. Recognition of its importance for individual and group identity, and of the tensions generated by the differing linguistic norms of mainstream society and family and friends, might help teachers to be more sensitive in their approach to teaching standard German and correcting non-standard

usages. If we accept that it is advantageous for speakers of non-standard dialects to be taught the standard variety (not so that they can communicate adequately, but so that they can escape the effects of social prejudice, cf. Barbour 1987: 242), then we will want to see greater motivation on the part of pupils and creating a sociolinguistic awareness amongst teachers is a step towards that.

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<sup>1</sup> In this quotation 'dialect-speaking children' refers to children who speak non-standard dialects of German. The German term *Dialekt* (which Hagen is translating here) is normally reserved by academic linguists for the basal form of a regional, non-standard dialect, although lay people often use it for varieties that are much closer to standard German (*Hochdeutsch*). Linguists normally label the variety space between *Hochdeutsch* and *Dialekt* as *Umgangssprache*, which is usually translated rather vaguely as 'colloquial speech' (Davies 1995: 19-23). However, as Barbour and Stevenson point out (1990: 140), many German speakers divide their local speech simply into *Hochdeutsch* and *Dialekt* and consider themselves to be native speakers of one or the other. *Dialekt* is not used by linguists or lay people as a synonym of 'variety' (unlike 'dialect' in the usage of English-speaking linguists) since it always includes the geographical dimension of variation in contrast to *Hochdeutsch*, which implies a supraregional variety. German-speaking linguists would, therefore, never refer to *Hochdeutsch* as a *Dialekt* of German. In this article I shall use the terms '(regional) non-standard dialect' for *Dialekt* and varieties of *Umgangssprache*, and 'standard German' or 'standard variety of German' for *Hochdeutsch*.

<sup>2</sup> Studies of linguistic attitudes in central and southern Germany (e.g. Davies 1995) have established that the use of standard German with a northern accent is often interpreted in this way.

<sup>3</sup> More than one teacher in my survey mentioned that children from the former GDR who spoke a non-standard Saxon dialect were laughed at and many quickly tried to adapt to the local variety.

<sup>4</sup> Rampton (1995) shows how adolescents in England exploit linguistic variation (switching between Panjabi, Creole and Indian English) to show their affiliation with different social groupings at different times.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. *Bildungsplan für die Grundschule Baden-Württemberg. Deutsch*. 1994: 20.

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<sup>6</sup> For a description of the German education system see *Facts about Germany*, Frankfurt 1995: 404-10.

<sup>7</sup> *Sprachreflexion* has tended to be restricted to reflection on grammar (Luchtenberg (1997: 110), and therefore has a narrower field of reference than Language awareness as generally understood by English-speaking sociolinguists.

<sup>8</sup> This question was originally intended to find out about the status of the non-standard dialect relative to standard German, hence the reference to history rather than a more general enquiry about the informant's knowledge of the non-standard dialect. There might have been more affirmative answers if the question had been more general.

<sup>9</sup> For a critique of the language-as-resource idea in the British context, see Bhatt and Martin-Jones 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Mattheier (1980: 118) also maintains that dialect is used only in certain exceptional situations, e.g. for discussing dialect literature in literature classes, or in very informal types of teaching, e.g. on nature walks.

<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to imagine German teachers giving cause for newspaper reports such as 'Cor Blimey, would you Adam and Eve it?', which opens 'It ain't 'arf OK for kids not to talk proper' (from the *Star*, quoted in Cameron 1995: 101). It is, however, important to note that the two concepts 'standard English' and 'standard German' are not directly comparable, especially in their spoken realisations, and attitudes towards them are consequently different. The prestige accent associated most closely with standard English is a class-based one, known as Received Pronunciation (RP). It is still primarily a socially marked variety, spoken by about ten per cent only of the population of England (Durrell 1992: 6-7). Spoken standard German is not associated with a particular class or region in the same way, although it does tend to be associated with formal contexts.